

IDAHO PRO BONO WEEK

**By: Jim Jones, Chairman
Idaho Pro Bono Commission**

Idaho's legal community is observing Idaho Pro Bono Week, October 20–26. The Idaho Pro Bono Commission is urging Idaho lawyers to commit more legal help to those who cannot afford it, while recognizing the many lawyers who have provided cost-free services in the past.

Free legal services to low-income Idahoans are made available through a variety of sources. The Idaho Volunteer Lawyers Program, operated out of the offices of the Idaho State Bar, accepts requests for legal services, screens the applicants for income eligibility, and makes referrals to lawyers willing to provide free representation. In 2012, more than 765 attorneys, working in association with the program, provided more than 16,000 hours of volunteer attorney assistance to more than 2,200 low-income individuals and families, including legal representation in more than 600 state court cases, while in 2013 volunteer lawyers provided 1,114 hours of pro bono service in federal court cases, resulting in the provision of a combined total of free legal services valued at almost \$3,000,000.

Idaho Legal Aid Services, with headquarters in Boise and branch offices in several locations in the State, helps thousands of Idahoans with legal problems such as domestic violence, wrongful evictions, illegal foreclosures, guardianships for abused or neglected children, Medicaid and Social Security problems of seniors, and unlawful discrimination. Unfortunately, Legal Aid's important work has been hampered by reductions in federal funding, at a time when the need for help has dramatically increased. A source of State funding is necessary in order for Legal Aid to represent the large number of individuals and families whose legal needs cannot presently be met. Pro Bono Commission members are committed to obtaining that much-needed State support.

The graduating class of 2013 at the University of Idaho College of Law compiled approximately 12,172 hours of pro bono services, under the supervision of Idaho lawyers and judges, as part of the college's distinctive pro bono program in which every student participates. Students and faculty at Concordia University School of Law contributed 816 hours of pro bono service in their inaugural year, and are committed to expanding access to justice through their pro bono service requirement, their on-site legal clinic, and providing pro bono training for Idaho lawyers.

In addition, many Idaho lawyers, acting on their own volition, generously provide many untallied hours of pro bono service to citizens of Idaho without asking or receiving any recognition for their unpaid services.

The Idaho Pro Bono Commission was established in 2008 with the charge of encouraging lawyers to provide more pro bono service. Its constituent members consist of Idaho's state courts, the United States Courts in Idaho, the Idaho State Bar, the Idaho Law Foundation, the University of Idaho College of Law, and Concordia University College of Idaho.

The Commission and its members recognize that our country's dedication to equal justice under the law cannot be realized if people with limited financial resources are not able to have access to the courts. The need for free legal services has substantially increased because of our weak economy. The Commission and its members are consequently intensifying their efforts to get more attorney participation in pro bono work. Recognition and celebration of Pro Bono Week in Idaho is part of that effort.